

Dates of Publication Surveys are conducted quarterly: March, June, September, December

Cost of Food at Home for a Week in Alaska September 1999
21 Communities Surveyed

Up to three stores in each of 21 communities were surveyed during September of 1999 for the cost of a specific set of food and non-food items. The 104 food items selected were taken, with some modification, from the USDA Low-cost Food Plan which is itself based on a nationwide survey of eating habits of Americans, conducted in 1977-78. In addition, the costs of such items as water, propane and electricity were collected. All costs were adjusted to reflect local sales tax where applicable. Since Wasilla and Palmer were combined in this census, their differing sales taxes were averaged when calculating food costs.

The estimated prices of unavailable food items in various communities were calculated as the expected cost as judged from the prices of all available items relative to the price of those items in Anchorage. The percent of foods unavailable in each community are shown in the survey.

Weekly food consumption rates for a family of 4, children 6 - 11 years, form the basis of the expressed food costs. All other costs are ratios of that cost as calculated from the USDA Cost of Food at Home survey issued September, 1999. The cost for this family of 4 can be calculated from the table by summing the individual members. For smaller families such a sum would be too low and should be adjusted up by 20%, 10% or 5% for families of 1, 2 or 3 persons respectively. Similarly, the sum for larger families would be too high and downward adjustments of 5% and 10% are suggested for 6 and 7 or more member families. These adjustments reflect that some economies may be realized when preparing foods for larger families.

Rows 18 through 22 represent historical food costs. The Anchorage column is a comparison of present to previous

Anchorage costs. Similarly the U.S. Average column represents changes in U.S. average prices. A one (1) appearing in the Anchorage column indicates that the current Anchorage cost is 1% higher now than at that date. Therefore, rising food costs are indicated by positive values. The remaining columns are each community's cost relative to Anchorage at that date. For instance, a cell containing a one (1) indicates a community that was experiencing a food cost 1% higher than Anchorage at that date. Note that the dollar value of the U.S. Average is not included in this survey since the methodology is not equivalent.

Winter brings a shift in diet from fresh foods to stored foods, especially in rural areas with infrequent food deliveries. Fresh fruits and vegetables are one of the most common seasonal casualties, and if available, are often of indifferent quality. There are many dietary reasons to maintain a substantial intake of fruits and vegetables including intake of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and dietary fiber. The following dialog will draw attention to dietary fiber.

While dietary fiber is easily pictured, it is less easily defined. The physiological concept equates to indigestible plant tissues. The chemical description includes cellulose, lignin, gums and pectin among other plant cellular and extracellular compounds. In fact compounds of animal origin (gristle, hair, carbonized offerings from the barbecue) and even from one's own gut can fit some definitions of fiber, if not always dietary fiber. Still, indigestible plant tissues fits the better part of any definition of dietary fiber. Fiber, being indigestible, lends bulk but few calories to the diet. Fiber functions to reduce the rate of dietary sugar absorption, which can be useful in management of diabetes. It can reduce LDL blood cholesterol levels thus reducing the likelihood of circulatory diseases. Fiber contributes both to a physical scrubbing of the colon (hind gut) lining and to beneficial hind gut fermentation (microbial activity). Indeed, it is this latter aspect of fiber that brings beans their gaseous notoriety. It is just such fermentation that results in butyric acid production, which in turn feeds the

tissues of the colon, promotes their growth and healthy development, as well as inhibits colonic disease. Finally, indigestible fiber, through its water-binding properties, promotes the undeniable benefits of ease of laxation.

While it is possible to pursue one's livelihood and simultaneously consume very little dietary fiber, current thought supports submitting vegetative matter to one's molars. There is evidence that the equivalent of no more than 13 pounds of apples (43 apples at 0.8% fiber) or apple sauce (1.6 gallons), or even 34 pounds (530 fluid ounces) of apple juice can provide the maximum benefits of dietary fiber. Nevertheless, the recommended intake for the dispassionate consumer is 12 grams per day, equivalent to a mere 11 apples.

Table 1 shows the dietary fiber and caloric content of some commonly eaten foods. Calories are important in the context of fiber since we tend to eat for calories. The amount of nutrients (protein, vitamins, minerals, dietary fiber) consumed along with calories defines the 'nutrient density' of the food. For instance, baked potatoes and french fries have similar fiber content but very different calorie content.

Table 1. The fiber and calorie content in some representative foods.		
	Value per 100 grams edible portion	
	Dietary fiber (grams)	Calories (kcal)
Apples	0.77	59
Apple juice	0.32	47
Blueberries	1.3	56
Cabbage	0.8	99

French fries	0.75	315
Kidney beans. cooked	2.81	127
Oat Bran (1)	2.17	246
Potato. baked w/skin	0.66	109
Wheat bran (1)	7.19	216
Wheat germ (1)	2.82	360
Wheat flour. white (1)	0.25	364
Wheat flour. whole (1)	2.10	339
White bread	0.3	267
Whole wheat bread	1.5	246
(1) Crude fiber		

Sources Agriculture Handbook No.8. Rev. 1982. United States Department of Agriculture, Human Nutrition Information Service. Recommended Dietary Allowances, 10th ed. 1989. National Research Council. National Academy Press, Washington, DC Schneeman, B.O. and Gallaher, D.D. 1996. Present Knowledge in Nutrition. ILSI Press, Washington, D.C.

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